



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4100

February 21, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as our nation's chief law enforcement officer. I look forward to working with you to ensure the safety and security of the constituents I represent in South Dakota. As you begin your work, I write today to make you aware of an urgent matter in my state.

In his inaugural address, President Trump lamented the decaying state of public safety in our country, a theme he highlighted throughout his campaign. However, while the President has focused primarily on crime in America's large cities, it is critical that we address issues in rural areas, as well. South Dakota's small towns, for example, have traditionally been safe places in which to live and raise a family, but in recent years, our communities have been increasingly threatened by a precipitous rise in violent crime.

Levels of violent crime in South Dakota have risen steadily over at least the past decade. According to the most recent data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the rate of violent crimes in South Dakota more than doubled between 2005¹ and 2015.² The detailed statistics are even more shocking. The South Dakota State Attorney General's 2015 crime report shows increases in violent crime from 2014: drug arrests increased more than 22 percent, rapes increased 11 percent, and murders increased 35 percent.³ The increase in murders followed a 66.7 percent increase between 2013 and 2014.⁴ Of course, this disturbing trend did not occur in a vacuum, and law enforcement officials generally blame the increase in violent crime on a combination of illegal drugs and gang activity.

¹ Crime in the U.S., 2005. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Available at: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2005>.

² Crime in the U.S., 2015. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Available at: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-5>.

³ Crime in South Dakota 2015. Office of the Attorney General. Available at: http://atg.sd.gov/docs/SAC_2015_CSD.pdf.

⁴ Crime in South Dakota 2014. Office of the Attorney General. Available at: http://atg.sd.gov/docs/SAC_2014_CSD.pdf.

Many states are experiencing severe opioid crises that often begin with prescription drug addiction and result in heroin use. South Dakota is no different, but our state has also long been plagued by methamphetamine addiction.⁵ Sioux Falls police are arresting more and more people each year for meth possession.⁶ Drug cases in the city have increased by nearly 1,000 in the past four years, necessitating additional Drug Task Force personnel.⁷ Cheap, highly addictive meth has been flowing into South Dakota from neighboring states. Drug interdiction is increasingly important, given that law enforcement officials have found that the drug is typically no longer produced locally in large labs. Rather, it is being produced in small quantities or being trafficked into the state by Mexican drug cartels.⁸ South Dakota officials are working to combat this problem, with Governor Dugaard recently announcing the formation of a Drug Interdiction Task Force.⁹

Where drugs go, violence follows. According to recent news reports, more than half of the property crimes reported to Sioux Falls police are related to meth.¹⁰ After 2015 became a “record year for murder” in Rapid City, the city’s police chief explained that most of the cases “have a direct nexus to meth.”¹¹ Sadly, 2017 does not seem like it will break the trend, as police are already investigating three homicides, due to “the increased use of methamphetamine.”¹² Aggravated assaults are also on the rise. While the increase is partly due to a change in the legal definition of aggravated assault and population growth, a recent report found an increase even after accounting for the changes.¹³

The rise in violent crime has led to Sioux Falls, the largest city in South Dakota, being given the dubious distinction of having higher violent crime rates than other similarly-sized cities in the region, including Omaha, NE, Lincoln, NE, and Fargo, ND.¹⁴ This is echoed in recent increases in sexual violence. A recent news report based on the most recent FBI statistics found that in 2015, Sioux Falls had a per capita rate of forced rape that was 65 percent higher than similar cities.¹⁵ Sadly, that statistic is reflected across the state, as South Dakota had the second highest rate of rapes per capita in the entire country.¹⁶

⁵ “Meth and heroin use rising in SD.” *KSFY*, April 6, 2016. Available at:

<http://www.ksfy.com/home/headlines/Meth-and-heroin-use-rising-in-SD-374845921.html>.

⁶ “Sioux Falls police chief blames drugs for increase in crime.” *Mitchell Daily Republic*, Jan. 19, 2017. Available at: <http://www.mitchellrepublic.com/news/4202381-sioux-falls-police-chief-blames-drugs-increase-crime>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ “Police chief: Meth cause of violent crime increase in SD.” *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, Sept. 28, 2016. Available at: <http://www.argusleader.com/story/news/crime/2016/09/28/police-chief-meth-cause-violent-crime-increase-sd/91222030/>.

⁹ Dugaard Discusses Meth Epidemic, IM 22 in Sioux Falls. *KDLT News*, January 16, 2017. Available at: <http://www.kdlt.com/2017/01/16/dugaard-discusses-meth-epidemic-im-22-sioux-falls/>.

¹⁰ “Police chief: Meth cause of violent crime increase in SD.”

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² “3 homicide investigations in Rapid City in new year.” *Rapid City Journal*, Feb. 3, 2017. Available at: http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/state-and-regional/homicide-investigations-in-rapid-city-in-new-year/article_e9f475d4-6ba0-5e67-8b2f-48e17d684db7.html.

¹³ “Is South Dakota more violent than it’s ever been?” *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, Jan. 13, 2017. Available at: <http://www.argusleader.com/story/news/crime/2017/01/13/south-dakota-more-violent-than-s-ever-been/96456896/>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ “South Dakota ranks 2nd highest per capita for rapes. *KSFY*, Feb. 14, 2017. Available at: <http://www.ksfy.com/content/news/413788893.html>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

Drugs and related crime are also affecting South Dakota's rural tribal communities. Sadly, substance abuse has long been a critical problem for Indian tribes in South Dakota, whose communities are home to some of the most vulnerable populations in the entire country. Substance abuse infiltrates and damages these communities and families, resulting in a heartbreaking cycle of broken homes, suicide, and increasing violence. New 2016 FBI data shows the homicide rate is nearly double the 2015 level on the Pine Ridge Reservation, home to the Oglala Sioux Tribe. FBI officials linked the uptick to "an increase in illegal drug use, particularly methamphetamine."¹⁷

As in Sioux Falls and Rapid City, it is likely that most of the meth found on South Dakota's Indian reservations is not produced there; one 2006 report estimated that more than 70 percent of meth on Indian reservations is now smuggled into the U.S. from Mexico.¹⁸ Indeed, it is no secret that drug cartels have long targeted reservations.¹⁹ That cartel presence and the high rates of substance abuse are a deadly combination that has inevitably led to violence. A 2009 report documented at least 39 gangs on the Pine Ridge Reservation alone, adding that the gangs "are being blamed for an increase in vandalism, theft, violence and fear."²⁰ Former Oglala Sioux Tribe President John Yellow Bird Steele said of one recent incident, "If a person sits down here, he can connect the dots. It's several incidents of our tribal members being murdered. And it's all related to drugs."²¹

Tribes are doing all they can to break the trend of substance abuse and violence, but they face an uphill battle. Then-President Steele found the drugs and gang violence on Pine Ridge so pressing that he declared a state of emergency on the Reservation, citing a need for additional law enforcement officers.²² In 2015, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council voted to dis-enroll and banish any tribal member convicted of manufacturing or dealing drugs. The resolution said in part, "methamphetamine has caused an increase in murder, suicides, assaults, burglary, vandalism, child abuse, child neglect among many other injustices..."²³ To make matters worse, large reservations, especially those in the Great Plains, are notoriously difficult for law enforcement to patrol due to their massive size. According to the National

¹⁷ "Homicides on Pine Ridge reservation nearly doubled in 2016." *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, Feb. 12, 2017. Available at: <http://www.argusleader.com/story/news/2017/02/12/homicides-pine-ridge-reservation-nearly-doubled/97826540/>.

¹⁸ "Methamphetamine in Indian Country: An American Problem Uniquely Affecting Indian Country." National Congress of American Indians. Available at:

https://www.justice.gov/archive/tribal/docs/fv_tjs/session_1/session1_presentations/Meth_Overview.pdf.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ "Gang Violence Grows on an Indian Reservation." *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 2009. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/14/us/14gangs.html>.

²¹ "Pine Ridge officials look to curb drug-related violent crime after recent shooting." *KEVN Black Hills Fox*, Oct. 18, 2016. Available at: <http://www.blackhillsfox.com/content/news/Pine-Ridge-officials-look-to-curb-drug-related-violent-crime-on-reservation-397524801.html>.

²² "Officials declare state of emergency on Pine Ridge." *KEVN Black Hills Fox*, May 12, 2016. Available at: <http://www.blackhillsfox.com/home/headlines/Officials-declare-state-of-emergency-on-Pine-Ridge-379280551.html>.

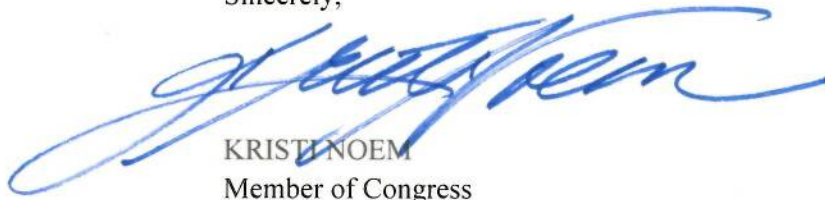
²³ "Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council Votes to Banish Drug Dealers for Life from Tribe." *Native News Online*, July 9, 2015. Available at: <http://nativenewsonline.net/currents/cheyenne-river-sioux-tribal-council-votes-to-banish-drug-dealers-for-life-from-tribe/>.

Congress of American Indians, many tribes are only able to field two or three officers each shift, each patrolling several hundred miles.²⁴

I have met with numerous state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers during my tenure in the U.S. House of Representatives. I fully support their work on the front lines. To supplement their work, I would like to meet with you as you evaluate the nation's law enforcement needs so we can discuss the situation in South Dakota and other rural states. Additionally, I urge you to redouble your agency's efforts to combat drug trafficking, gang proliferation, as well as the violent crime that all too often follows.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. I stand ready to work with you. If I can be of any help, please contact my staff at 202-225-2801.

Sincerely,



KRISTI NOEM
Member of Congress

²⁴ "Methamphetamine in Indian Country: An American Problem Uniquely Affecting Indian Country."